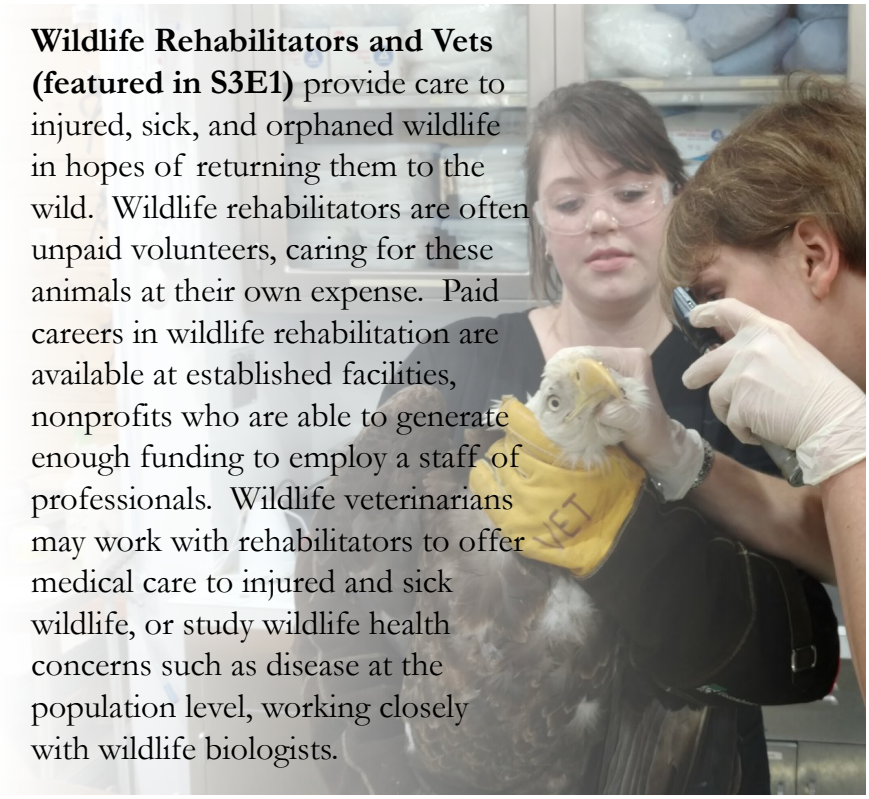
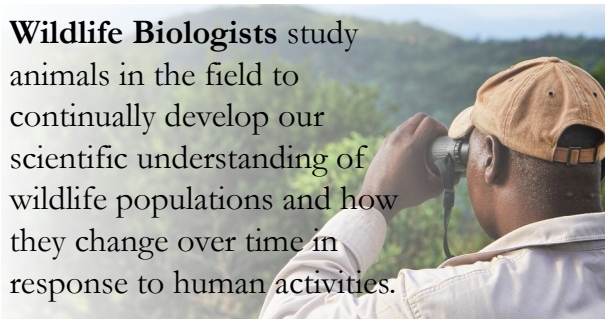
Wildlife Careers

Season Three, Episode Seven

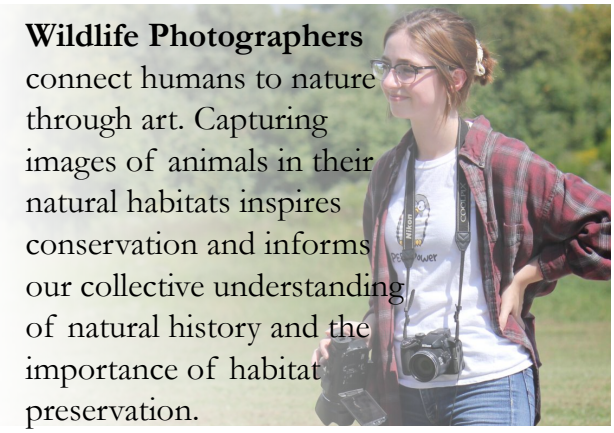
Careers in wildlife and conservation span a range of specializations and skill sets. From rehabilitation and medical care of wildlife, to law enforcement, research, and education, there are careers in wildlife to suit a variety of interests and backgrounds.



Wildlife Rehabilitators and Vets (featured in S3E1) provide care to injured, sick, and orphaned wildlife in hopes of returning them to the wild. Wildlife rehabilitators are often unpaid volunteers, caring for these animals at their own expense. Paid careers in wildlife rehabilitation are available at established facilities, nonprofits who are able to generate enough funding to employ a staff of professionals. Wildlife veterinarians may work with rehabilitators to offer medical care to injured and sick wildlife, or study wildlife health concerns such as disease at the population level, working closely with wildlife biologists.



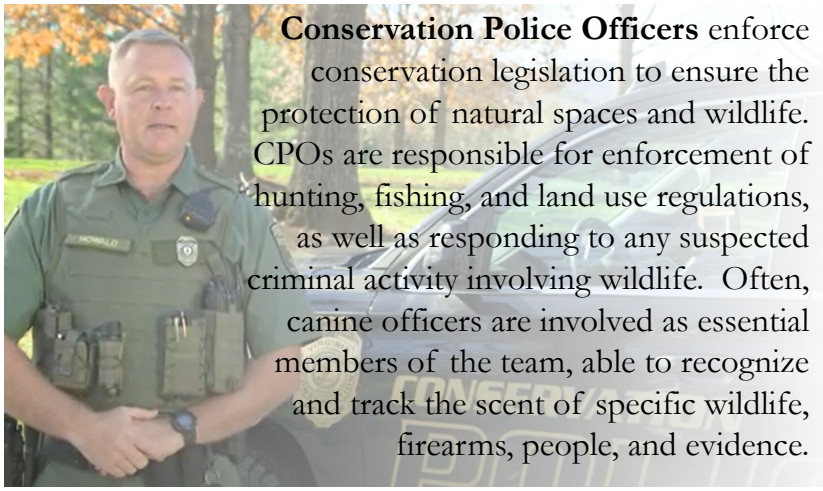
Wildlife Biologists study animals in the field to continually develop our scientific understanding of wildlife populations and how they change over time in response to human activities.



Wildlife Photographers connect humans to nature through art. Capturing images of animals in their natural habitats inspires conservation and informs our collective understanding of natural history and the importance of habitat preservation.



Outreach Educators work to connect the public with wildlife and the challenges they face through education programs, often with the help of animal ambassadors. Outreach educators share stories and provide unique experiences that instill an appreciation and respect for the natural world.



Conservation Police Officers enforce conservation legislation to ensure the protection of natural spaces and wildlife. CPOs are responsible for enforcement of hunting, fishing, and land use regulations, as well as responding to any suspected criminal activity involving wildlife. Often, canine officers are involved as essential members of the team, able to recognize and track the scent of specific wildlife, firearms, people, and evidence.

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Writing Prompts

These writing prompts are designed to inspire critical thinking and promote an understanding of the variety of wildlife careers available and how those roles contribute to conservation efforts overall. Questions may require additional research and can be answered individually in writing, or discussed out loud in a group setting.

Wildlife and conservation professionals often cooperate with others in related fields. For example, wildlife biologists and conservation police officers work together to determine, manage, and enforce regulations related to wildlife, especially game species such as deer and turkey. Do you think it would be better for these things to be fully managed by one group, rather than having overlap in areas like these? What do you think are the challenges and benefits of a cooperative approach like this?

There are so many creative ways to apply your existing skills and interests to helping wildlife, and some of those could even lead to lifelong careers in wildlife and conservation. What are your unique skills; are you an artist or musician? Do you enjoy building things or writing? What are you best at? Consider and share how these special interests of yours could be applied to the field of wildlife and conservation.

In Virginia, Black Bears are studied by wildlife biologists who track their locations and behaviors. Hunting bears is legal under regulations enforced by conservation police officers. Injured, sick, or orphaned bears are cared for by wildlife hospitals employing veterinarians, rehabilitators, and public outreach educators. Choose a specific species of wildlife and describe the ways in which it may encounter or be affected by each of the wildlife careers discussed in this episode, as well as other wildlife careers you can think of. How many different types of professions can you link to a single, specific species of wildlife? What do you think this means about the importance of conservation for our society? What would happen if one of these careers didn't exist?

Do some research on a person or organization involved in wildlife and conservation whose work you find interesting. Write a letter introducing yourself and applying for an internship or job with them. Be sure to highlight your unique skills and interests, and how you believe you would be an asset to the team. For group discussion, share your letters and point out skills you see in your classmates that they could add to their letters. Remember, there are many ways we can apply our unique abilities and interests to these careers that may not be immediately apparent, be creative!

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Be a Biologist Activity

Wildlife biologists study animals in their natural habitats in a variety of ways. Sometimes they place trackers on animals and monitor their movements remotely using satellite data. In other instances, biologists rely on the signs left behind by animals to make conclusions about habitat use and other aspects of natural history. Frequently, biologists rely on simple, real-time observations of wildlife with their own eyes. In this activity, we will practice detailed observation.

Find a quiet place in nature where wildlife is present. You may observe any species of wildlife, including birds, insects, or anything else you are able to watch quietly. Choose one animal and watch carefully. Note the animal's behavior, posture, position, and appearance. Observe the animal for 10 minutes, or as long as it stays visible. Using the form below, record your observations and answer the questions. Share results with classmates and discuss any trends or unique observations you noticed.

Species: _____
Location: _____
Time observed: _____ to _____
Number of individuals observed: _____

Describe the animal's general appearance:

Describe the animal's behavior, be specific:

Check each type of behavior you observed and approximate how much time each was observed:

	Behavior	Time Spent (min or %)
❑	Feeding	_____
❑	Grooming or Preening	_____
❑	Calling or Vocalizing	_____
❑	Locomoting (moving)	_____
❑	Other _____	_____

What other animals did you see during your observations? Did you observe any species interactions?

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